

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 13, 2011

Agenda Item: Helena Urban Deer Take

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 minutes

Background: In 2003 the Montana Legislature authorized cities to create plans to control wildlife to address public health and safety within city limits. Such plans must be approved by FWP. The City of Helena subsequently developed an Urban Deer Management Plan seeking to initially remove 350 deer to achieve an objective of 25 deer per square mile in the city and presented it to FWP and the FWP Commission. After much discussion, Commissioners ultimately approved two pilot projects that recently allowed for the removal of 200 urban deer by the City of Helena Police Department with limited assistance from FWP.

After the pilot efforts, and from lessons learned, the City of Helena sought to define a programmatic approach for its Urban Deer Management Plan. This included a third, programmatic environmental assessment that confirmed objectives and methods relative to urban deer management in Helena. While the programmatic EA did confirm objectives and methods, any take/removal of deer will require approval by the FWP Commission on an annual basis. To date a total of 400 deer have removed. No significant FWP staff or resources have been or are slated specifically for this deer-removal component. Any quotas do not apply to individual deer removed under urgent public-safety situations that may occur at any time and often involve direct FWP participation.

A population survey early this fall resulted in a density estimate of approximately 17 deer/square mile that is reduced from the 2009 estimate of 47 deer/sq mile and below the identified target density of 25. Given projected growth potentials the City is looking for a relatively small take up to 50 deer to prevent population growth above the target of 25 deer/sq mile. While this take is to occur with methods identical to those employed previously (trap and lethal removal), the City continues to explore other options that include contraception. The City will first apply this quota to complaint areas with no take efforts on this quota after March 31, 2011.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The City of Helena provided extensive public involvement in developing their plan and the previous urban deer environmental assessments for FWP's authorization of deer removal provided separate 30-day public comment periods. Public support has been split throughout these earlier processes. In addition to public comment at the December 9 Commission meeting, public comment will run from December 10 thru 5 p.m. Monday, December 27, 2010. As of Tuesday, December 21 fifteen comment entries with varied content have been received. All comments will be forwarded to the FWP Commission.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2010 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

Proposed Motion: I move the Commission adopt as final the take of up to 50 urban deer by the City of Helena as presented by City staff and FWP.